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How to keep the noise down without using the 'Shush' word!



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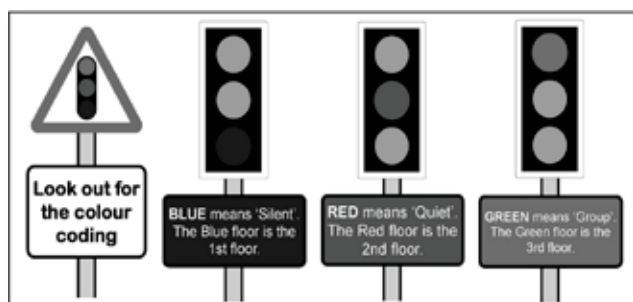
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In autumn 2005 Leeds Metropolitan University's Civic Quarter Library began a pilot to 'zone' study space to meet the differing demands of students. Requests asking for increased group study areas as more assignments require collaborative work had to be balanced by silent areas to support more traditional use of the library. Previously staff had often found themselves in an unpleasant situation trying to keep noise levels down on the floors: we hoped that by offering students somewhere else to go within the library it would be less stressful for all concerned.

The three main floors were designated silent, quiet and group study and the library's publicity group was tasked with raising awareness of the new arrangement and also thinking about how we could 'teach' students the type of behaviour acceptable on each floor. As part of the original building design each floor had been assigned a colour to distinguish between them (they all have the same basic layout of main book room with open access PC and study areas and separate areas of group study rooms, teaching rooms and print areas. The corridor leading to the latter had already been designated 'phone zones' in an earlier initiative.)

Clearly this gave us our starting point and we used a 'traffic light' system with each colour

representing the type of study environment, i.e. blue for silent, red for quiet and green for group. The colours were used as background to posters displayed throughout the library, including the lifts, so students knew which floor to select to suit their particular study need.



We decided to use flyers to support staff in monitoring the use of the space and, in true library style, sent an email to colleagues asking them to suggest slogans to help. Our usual positive response however meant that Karen and I found ourselves in the position of judges and had to gently turn down some of the less (or more!) creative efforts! In the end we chose slogans as the basis for flyers directing students to the most suitable floor and used a 'complete work' displayed in the staffroom to remind staff of the

initiative. The flyers were left on tables on each floor and also given out on an individual basis. The library was very keen to ensure that students were happy with the zoning and conducted an initial survey which included a question on whether respondents were aware of the different environments. A 100% positive response rate indicated that we'd raised awareness and staff reported the flyers helped them enforce the rules without being too confrontational. Students have voted to continue with these new arrangements, recognising the library's attempts to support the needs of all its users. And it means it's much easier to provide silent study without anyone having to say 'shush'!

For further information on Leeds Met's zoning project please contact Dilys Young (D.A.Young@leedsmet.ac.uk)

